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ABSTRACT

Written to shed light on the unique recruitment and retention problems faced by rural and small school districts, this booklet also presents strategies to address these problems. Among problems noted in the opening overview are that recruiting and retaining good teachers in rural and small schools is complicated by inadequate pay which does not compensate educators for isolation, easily discouraged educators who haven't been prepared for rural living and teaching become easily discouraged; that there is a negative rural stereotype; and that there are too few good educators in the hiring pool overall. The chapter on research findings acknowledges that data collection efforts in rural education are recent, but that existing data do show that distinct differences between rural and nonrural schools affect a district's ability to attract and retain teachers. Two chapters consider recruitment and urge that recruiters be well-prepared, represent the community as well as the school, and stress the positive aspects of small communities. Suggestions cover how to publicize vacancies, where to look for potential teachers, and what kinds of incentives have been successful. A final chapter on retaining staff provides suggested activities for helping staff acclimate themselves and grow professionally, cites understandings teachers need to cope with rural life, and describes the Rural Job Referral Service. A bibliography, author page, and acknowledgements conclude the booklet. (BRR)

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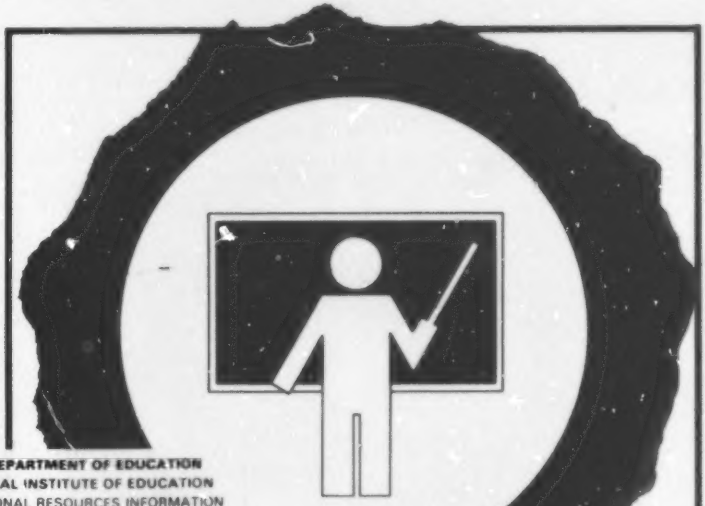
AASA Small Schools Series #2

TEACHERS

Finding and Keeping the Best in Small and Rural School Districts



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American Association of School Administrators

TEACHERS

Finding and Keeping the Best in Small and Rural Districts

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The AASA Small School Program

The American Association of School Administrators is the professional association of more than 18,000 district-level educational administrators and others involved in elementary and secondary education. In addition to the general services AASA provides for all members, a special program has been established for the many school district administrators who manage smaller systems. Special services include a newsletter, convention and training programs, and an annual conference of small school district administrators.

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Introduction

Among the problems identified by rural educators throughout this century, few seem as insolvable as recruiting and retraining teachers of high quality. In workshops, conferences, and informal discussions about rural education, the message is the same: Finding and keeping teachers is not getting any easier, especially in certain subject or specialty areas. In the 1980s, large urban districts that usually are first to attract highly skilled personnel report great difficulty in finding qualified math, science, vocational, and special education teachers. For some 12,000 small and rural districts that compete for the same professionals, the problem nears a crisis level.

Faced with a growing dilemma, school administrators have come to view the problem of attracting and holding quality staff as an inevitable fact of small and rural school life. After years of experience, certain "best practices" have emerged. This publication aims to shed light on the unique recruitment and retention problems faced by rural and small school districts. It also poses strategies that may enable school officials to meet the challenge of finding and keeping the best teachers in order to achieve excellence for every student.

Chapter 1

An Overview of Recruitment and Retention

The problems of recruiting and retaining quality teachers have been documented for some time.

> For some thirty years prior to 1970, school districts recruited and selected teachers in a seller's market. . . . Today, the market for teachers is radically different.
>
> —National Institute of Education Conference Report on recruitment, selection, and retention (1974)

Over the years, experts have disagreed about the reasons why small schools compete less well in finding and holding on to the best teachers. Some say teacher pay is inadequate and does not compensate educators for isolation and other problems common to remote areas. Others say educators become discouraged easily because they are not prepared properly by colleges and universities to cope with the realities of teaching and living in rural areas.

Still others feel small and rural districts are plagued by a negative stereotype that makes working and living there seem unattractive. Positive features such as relatively small classes, few discipline problems, opportunities for independent teaching and decision making, and the lower cost and enjoyable pace of living have not been promoted enough by rural recruiters.

Most agree that the problem, for various reasons, stems from too few educators in the hiring pool. The diminished supply results, in part, from teacher colleges that responded to an oversupply in the 1970s by cutting back on the number of graduates. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics and National Education Association show that from 1966 to 1981, the number of all students with a bachelor's degree in education dipped from 22.1 percent to 11.6 percent.

Some teachers have abandoned the teaching profession and will not return. During the 1970s, when school district layoffs were frequent, many young and inexperienced educators moved to more lucrative professions, where they are now content to stay. Moreover, school districts each year continue to lose teachers to the private sector, which still needs and pays for educators with certain skills and knowledge.

Increasingly stiff certification requirements also eliminate potential teachers from the job market. Recently, a superintendent in a small New Mexico district tried to hire a middle school mathematics teacher. He telephoned 40 applicants from California to New York. The best candidates, he said, were uncertified or had no public school teaching experience. One was not a college graduate.

Finally, some experts conclude that the lack of teachers stems from the failed national interest to prepare educators the way the government did after Sputnik was launched.

The job market for educators appears to be expanding. Older, more experienced teachers who were untouched by layoffs are 50 years and older and will retire in the next decade. The Rand Corporation's recent report, "Beyond Commission Reports: The Coming of Crisis in Teaching," sees the baby boom generation's children increasing elementary school enrollments once again.

At the same time, teaching as a profession has lesser appeal now that career opportunities are expanding, especially for academically able women and minorities. School district policies also will increase the numbers of teachers desired. Reductions in class size and increased academic requirements resulting from a move toward excellence increases the need for more teachers.

A diminishing number of qualified teachers can have a devastating impact on the selection and retention of teachers in rural and small schools. James Athins, speaking at the Second Annual Rural Education Conference in 1980, said supply and demand in this decade will resemble shortage patterns of the 1960s, although

the supply of new teachers from which to choose will be smaller and more selective. Hiring will also resemble labor market conditions of the 1970s, with a surplus in some fields, a balanced supply in others, and an acute shortage in still others.

For small and rural districts that regularly face a staff turnover problem, continuity in hiring will be extremely difficult. Small and rural schools rely, as much as anything, on the winning personality of the recruiter to attract staff. High personnel turnover makes long term recruitment and retention procedures hard to sustain.

Two decades of federal programs, experimental teacher training programs, and occasional foundation efforts directed at the problems have yielded mixed results. The more educators learn about recruitment and retention in rural and small schools, the more complex the topic is. Some practical suggestions have emerged from administrators, training programs, voluntary organizations, and federally funded projects. This and current information about human motivation provide a helpful framework to improve the way school officials recruit and keep teachers.

Chapter II

What the Research Says

Widespread concern by practitioners about the recruitment and retention of staff in rural and small schools has not spawned bountiful research. In fact, most data collection on rural or rural special education only began in the late 1970s. The existing data show there are distinct differences in rural and nonrural schools that affect a district's ability to attract and retain teachers.

Little analysis has been done on how school districts choose their teachers or how selection practices affect the quality of teaching staffs. Research about teacher selection, which might be used for hiring decisions, has examined whether measures of teacher characteristics or teaching performance predict success in the classroom (Schalok, 1979), or how teacher characteristics are related to performance variables (Turner, 1975). Other studies have examined the characteristics of current and future teachers (Vance and Schletty, 1982).

Teacher Supply

The actual supply of teachers is not always what it appears to be. In the 1970s, a seemingly plentiful teacher supply led the public to believe that school districts were flush with good personnel. According to one survey conducted in 1978 by the National Education Association, there were 70,000 more teaching graduates than jobs. Yet, 936 Midwestern school superintendents polled the following year said a teacher shortage was occurring in their largely rural districts (Dunathan, 1979). There were plenty of jobs, but few qualified applicants to fill them.

Teacher Shortages

School districts cannot attract teachers equally, and the supply and demand of teachers varies widely with both the type of teaching speciality and private sector competition for jobs demanding similar skills and knowledge. Large and urban districts seem to have hiring advantages over small and rural schools. No matter how many education graduates exist, rural school superintendents often perceive a teacher shortage.

Factors such as social and cultural isolation, poor pay and salary differentials, limited mobility, and a lack of personal privacy are among reasons cited for the rural shortfall (Helge, 1983). Staff selection in rural areas, then, becomes dependent upon who is willing to apply rather than who the district would like to hire.

> In economic terms:
>
> Labor market transactions involve mutual, joint exchange of both labor services and consumption attributes at the workplace. Teachers sell the services of their labor, but simultaneously purchase utility-bearing characteristics of the schools in which they work. On the other side of the bargain, school administrators purchase desired teacher's services and jointly sell characteristics of schools and students to their teachers. (Antos & Rosen, 1975)

Geographical location, neighborhood and student characteristics, class size and composition, tenure and seniority privileges, and other working conditions also affect teacher supply (Boardman, Darling, Hammond and Mullin, 1982; Chambers, 1981). Because salaries and benefits often do not compensate school personnel for recognized disadvantages, certain jobs in rural or small school settings go begging.

Moreover, rigid lock-step salary schedules and monetary practices preclude the rural teacher market from adjusting quickly to changes in the supply and demand (Chambers, 1981). Shortages also result when qualified teachers are lured away by high paying private sector businesses and industry.

Certification and Tests

The federal government has reported that standards for rural personnel have been lower than in nonrural districts. In one poll of

200 rural school systems in all 50 states, 92 percent of the respondents relied on emergency certifications to help fill special education vacancies. In only 8 percent of the districts was this measure prohibited (Helge, 1983). Increasingly strict practices requiring state teacher certification rule out some graduates of teachers' colleges or otherwise skillful candidates who do not have proper credentials. Vance and Schlecty, 1982).

The lack of reciprocal certification can rule out teachers who are qualified in some states but not others (Helge, 1983). Those with single subject area certification may not be considered for positions in specialty areas like math, science and special and vocational education, which are in short supply (Dunathan, 1979). Moreover, special educators who are certified to teach children with a particular handicapping condition are not necessarily approved to teach those with other disabilities.

Several states are qualifying teachers based on results of the National Teacher Examination given at certain times each year. In 1984, some 12 states used the test developed and administered by Educational Testing Service to certify teachers. Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina now use teacher competency tests or competency-based certification programs. Oklahoma requires a competency test for certification and recertification as part of a larger legal effort to tighten education and teacher standards.

Most state and locally developed tests remain unvalidated. Some district officials feel that passing scores on these measures answer certain questions about cognitive competence. Legally, courts require that tests used for hiring and promotion as opposed to certification must relate directly to effective job performance. Unvalidated tests or those that could be shown to discriminate against minority, handicapped, or other individuals may pose legal issues if used for hiring and may eliminate from the hiring pool otherwise qualified candidates.

Evaluation

Potential teaching candidates are evaluated primarily on the basis of their credentials, personal characteristics, and performance. Methods used for this assessment differ depending on the district's goals, organization, and other influences. In fact, selecting and hiring teachers is a process vulnerable to various influences along the way and is considered successful depending upon how it is carried out.

> The selection process is hindered by the poverty and subjectivity of the information currently available on candidates and a frequent lack of clarity of goals and standards for employment. Effective selection is also impeded by the lack of time and personnel, since personnel management and evaluation are two of those "unnecessary" educational administrative jobs that the public increasingly views as superfluous at budget time. (Hathaway, 1980)

No single set of reliable and valid methods has been discovered that predicts who will be an effective teacher (Doyle, 1978). In addition, research shows that no single set of skills, attitudes, abilities, or interests are relative to good teaching (King, 1981). Measures of intelligence and academic achievement do not correlate significantly with teaching effectiveness (Morsh and Wilder, 1954, Schalock, 1979). However, teachers who demonstrate flexibility, adaptability, and creativity exhibit the most consistent relationship with ratings of teacher effectiveness and performance (Schalock, 1979).

Personal traits, knowledge, skills, professional points of view, and actual teaching abilities of potential employees usually are examined through interviews, analysis of credentials and student teaching or work experiences, paper and pencil tests, and actual teaching performance.

Some studies have shown that specific teaching patterns, although vulnerable, appear to be linked to effectiveness, depending upon the teaching context (Gage, 1978, Rosenshine, 1979). The patterns, which include clarity, variability, and the ability to engage students in learning activities, are not easily broken down to particular actions that can be assessed.

Another comprehensive study on teacher effectiveness, the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study conducted for a California education commission on teacher preparation, found few links between discrete teacher behaviors and student learning. Other researchers have shown that effective teaching skills vary for different grade levels and subject areas (McDonald and Elias) and for students with different socioeconomic, psychological, and mental characteristics (Cronbach and Snow, 1977).

Student teacher ratings have been found to be predictors of later teaching performance, so long as the teaching contexts match closely

(Schalock, 1979). District decisionmakers might be inclined to use predictors that are close to the actual demands of the job in evaluating prospective candidates. However, this and related measures such as teaching a class at some point during an interview will raise the costs of recruitment and selection.

Recruitment Costs

Gathering and providing information for recruitment purposes has its benefits but comes at a cost.

> The benefit that is attributable to information derives from its value in improving decisionmaking and its resultant outcomes. . . . The cost of information refers to the resources required to collect, analyze, and disseminate it as well as the cost to the user of acting on it. Such costs include not only the pecuniary ones that we can find on accounting statements but also such 'nonaccounting' costs as the information-user's time in obtaining the information. (Levin, 1980)

Certain kinds of information comes to school districts more cheaply than others. State certification credentials are inexpensive but do not indicate which individuals would make the best teachers for a particular school system. More expensive ways to gather and evaluate information, therefore, are necessary. These include interviews and associated costs (transportation, lodging, meals, etc.) and objective rating scales. (For example, Superintendent Harold Tokerud of Colstrip, Montana, uses a Selection Review Institute, 301 S. 68th St., Lincoln, Neb. 88510) interview system using objective measures that yield a numerical score to add to subjective data.)

For each school district, the time comes when the costs of gathering and evaluating prospective teacher information outweighs the benefits. For this reason, cost-benefit estimates, however difficult to compute, are important.

Teacher Turnover

Rural districts are faced with high rates of staff turnover. According to one special education study conducted in 1980 by the National Rural Project, nearly half of the 75 school districts polled in 17 states reported problems in retaining teachers (Helge and Marrs, 1981). Many teachers who left were young, inexperienced, and

cited cultural and social isolation as reasons for moving to the first openings in nonrural settings.

Some states cited an annual teacher turnover rate of 30 percent to 50 percent in rural areas, with almost a full turnover every three years. The vacated positions could not be filled again for long periods of time, even for years. In the same study, stresses of providing an appropriate education to handicapped children, working with rural parents, paperwork requirements, and the lack of modified curricula hastened morale problems and eventual "burnout."

Personnel Development

Findings from two studies conducted by the National Rural Project in 1978-79 and 1981 link staff retention problems to a lack of cultural and social activities in rural areas. In addition, inadequate staff development programs also were said to cause attrition. Administrators said in the 1981 report that constant turnover made implementation and development of long range planning and improvement virtually impossible. In fact, even with a stable faculty, personnel development usually stopped after basic orientation to district and state philosophies.

Formal Strategies

In 1983, the National Rural Project queried 200 special education administrators from 200 rural school systems in all 50 states and found that 44 percent of the districts had no successful retention strategies. Some 22 systems said they had developed recruitment strategies. The most effective of those emphasized positive aspects of rural life, such as low rent, opportunities for individual creativity and decision making, recreational opportunities, positive lifestyle variables, small populations, and fewer extracurricular academic distractions than in nonrural areas.

When comparatively inferior aspects of rural teaching—such as equipment or facilities—were discussed, district recruiters were most successful when they presented these factors as a "challenge to personal growth and creativity." These findings coincided with the motivational theory of psychologist Abraham Maslow, whose hierarchy of needs has been used effectively to develop successful recruitment and retention strategies (Helge and Marrs, 1981; Maslow, 1954; Thompson, 1975).

Personnel Preparation

Colleges and universities have not prepared personnel who can adjust to the demands of rural areas, according to a 1980 federal government briefing paper about special education teacher shortages. Other researchers agree that teacher training programs do not consider special rural needs or circumstances (Smith and Burke, 1983; Helge, 1983; Moriarty, 1981; Sher, 1977). The few programs that have rural adaptations or those located in rural areas still seem to have an urban bias (Helge, 1983). The National Institute of Education reported in 1981 that training programs for teachers and administrators mostly are urban-oriented, thus resulting in teachers prepared for the urban school. In addition, researchers found federally funded special education projects with "rural" in the title failed to train students systematically for a broad range of competencies needed by rural teachers (Helge, 1983).

Whether or not a training program has a rural component, 97 percent of some 200 special education administrators and teachers queried by NRP said their actual rural training took place on the job. Only 10 percent of respondents said they had adequate preservice training to prepare them for teaching in rural areas. Nearly 60 percent said that early in their on-site training work, simulations of problem-solving, team management and communications skills were needed most. Some 57 percent said administrative knowledge of service coordination, regional service delivery systems, team management, school law, finance, and itinerant services should be added to their coursework (Helge, 1983).

Other important priorities for preparing special education students included learning to work with rural peers, families and communities; developing the ability to work with the latest technology for effective management; and teaching with and discovering new or innovative resources.

Rural Staffing and Teaching Assignments

Rural communities spend high percentages of their local resources on education. Low tax bases often limit monies available to find and hire both teaching and support staff. The recent national interest in increasing academic standards and better preparing students for higher education and the work world are likely to strain the education budgets of small and rural schools. Currently, these schools must hire enough qualified teachers to cover basic subjects, no matter how many students there are in the school.

For this reason, classes often are small and a high percentage of education dollars already are spent on teacher salaries. Establishing new courses and hiring teachers who are likely to repeat historic patterns and leave after one or two years jeopardize the course offerings and a student's education if a replacement teacher cannot be found.

Rural teachers have expressed concern that course work has tipped in the direction of nonacademic emphasis (Muse, 1983). They report frequent student absences from core academic classes or widespread enrollment in easier courses in order to attain higher grades necessary for college admissions. Demands in small and rural schools are greater on the fewer students enrolled to participate in band, chorus, athletics, etc. These cause absences from academic coursework and leave the impression that the extracurricular activities are more important.

Chapter III

Using Motivation: The Key to Successful Recruitment and Retention

In order to gain a competitive edge in hiring the best and most qualified teachers, rural and small school officials must discover what would motivate a prospective teacher to seek employment in their districts. The following are some strategies based upon best practices described in current professional literature.

During the employment interview, satisfy an applicant's concerns about salary level, the educational facilities, and the availability of equipment, but concentrate on aspects of the job that enhance self-esteem, professional fulfillment, and a sense of belonging to the school and community:

- Small communities can be quite friendly and the potential exists to achieve a respected status.
- Small communities can be scenic, with easygoing lifestyles, little traffic, low pollution, and recreational opportunities related to open or unspoiled terrain.
- The school's programming is flexible enough to allow for work in the candidate's area of interest.
- Small enrollments allow for greater individual attention to students and higher quality education programs.

- Stress that administrators and peers are supportive of a teacher's growth and development, both formally and informally.
- University extension branches, professional libraries, or other means to professional improvement are easily accessible.

Couple an explanation about administrative and clerical responsibilities, which often discourage teachers, with descriptions of various teacher-pleasing opportunities for interacting with students.

Be a sincere interviewer and an active listener, since candidates often respond more to individual styles and skills than to the status or presentation of the interviewer.

Be encouraging to personnel who share lifestyles, interests, and attitudes with the community, since professional satisfaction alone will not hold a teacher.

- The best prospects are candidates who would understand and accept rural culture, have compatible behaviors and share interests with community members, have generic skills required to live and work comfortably, and have knowledge or interest in the community, its history, and political and communication systems.
- Equally valuable are abilities to adapt to different living conditions and develop local and long-distance support systems.
- If weather forces long periods of isolation, self-entertainers would be desirable.

Appeal to a candidate's sense of competition or interest in uniqueness. One district in scenic country advertised its vacancy as "an escape" from undesirable urban areas. An advertisement for a one-room schoolhouse drew many responses when it stated only the most qualified would be chosen and a two-year maximum contract was imposed so that others might enjoy and share their culture and perspectives with the students.

The National Rural Project suggests using the following informal checklist items culled from school interviewer's worksheets:

1. Will the interviewee's personal traits and goals be compatible with those in the area and not make him or her susceptible to criticism and vulnerable to the close vigil of many rural areas?
2. Can the community provide the necessary special and professional development opportunities for this applicant?
3. Will the position provide a realistic challenge to the applicant?
4. Does the applicant have hobbies or other avocational interests which initiate self-entertainment and self-sufficiency?
5. Is the applicant a good listener and genuinely interested in learning about the unique aspects of this particular community?
6. Is the applicant flexible enough to cross interdisciplinary and position lines as required in an area of scarce specialized resources?
7. Is the applicant able to cooperate with people with different viewpoints?
8. Is the applicant flexible enough to assess attributes of the community and produce educational resources using existing systems?

(NRP, 1981)

Chapter IV

Selling the District: Organizing for Profit

Designing, developing, and implementing a recruitment and retention plan can be exciting and educationally profitable if high quality and dedicated staff members result from the effort.

Three basic assumptions underlie a successful plan. First, recruiting is a year-long, ongoing activity. Every public appearance, trip, and school event are opportunities to create a good name for the district and publicize its virtues.

Second, recruiting requires help from everyone in the school and community. There is a role for students, parents, concerned citizens, college students, alumni and staff. Third, quality attracts quality.

A school district must have a visible commitment to excellence in all areas if it expects to draw outstanding applicants.

Strategies used to attract high quality teachers should unfold in a well arranged sequence. Advance planning includes collecting data, devising paperwork support, pulling together a recruitment team, creating public awareness and public relations activities, identifying recruitment targets, and assembling a needs assessment tool to use with applicants.

Collecting And Packaging Data

The more information a school district can present to applicants in an organized and attractive way, the more time the interviewer has to determine whether the applicant will fit into the school and community. The National Rural Project lists the following information as important to collect and present:

- Availability and cost of housing.
- Assistance in securing housing.
- Average cost of essential goods and services.

- Community, civic, and religious organizations.
- Local and regional transportation.
- Medical services.
- Babysitting and daycare services.
- Employment opportunities for spouses.
- School district salary and benefit information.
- Monthly community calendars.
- Community and county services, including law enforcement, sanitation, waste removal, and fire protection.
- Data on individuals, couples, and families of various ages; interests and backgrounds in the community.

Promotional literature and photographs are helpful. Materials should be packaged handsomely, since a district's professional portfolio helps create a positive first impression.

Attractive school logos and clear forms help. Many large districts are willing to lend their forms and formats virtually unchanged to small and rural districts who need a start. Other valuable nformation that has been shared with good results includes school annuals and staff handbooks, multiyear manpower plans, program descriptions, students achievement records, staff profiles, and descriptions and examples of unique resources.

Some rural districts have decided that applicants are likely to feel a sense of belonging to the larger community when a variety of brochures and other materials in the portfolio reflect local businesses, welcome wagons, civic clubs, and other groups who assist the school.

Paperwork support

Files on applicants should be complete. Proper forms and procedures should be in place for collecting application, reference, and rating forms and answering written and telephone inquiries. A brief and thoughtful letter regarding the interview outcome can be a mark of distinction. Even if candidates are unsuccessful, they may share the letter with others, indirectly becoming a member of the district's extended recruiting team.

Attention to detail and small differences in the way competing education agencies present themselves and what they offer can determine which district succeeds in hiring the best candidates. Some districts have gone so far as to work with the U.S. department of agriculture to provide low cost living quarters in order to gain a

competitive edge. Others have provided "teacherages," houses attached to the school at which the teacher is working.

Cheerleading by the Community

Image development begins at home. Successful leadership, outstanding instructional programs, and effective public relations contribute to a national image. Local residents must be made aware of the quality job that "their" educators are doing so that they can promote the school system. Teacher aides and support staff must convey a positive image for themselves and their schools. District leaders who can instill pride in the appearance of students, staff, and facilities have seen positive results when it is time to recruit teachers and other personnel. Teachers often make meaningful contributions and give unique perspectives when they participate in candidate interviews. Some rural districts select local people to serve as tour guides and school advocates.

A satisfied community usually carries forward a positive image outside the district and creates an important impression on potential teachers. Visitors and friends of the school staff have been known to locate qualified teacher applicants.

Publicizing Vacancies

Experience has shown that in many states, education graduates from certain schools nearly always accept teaching positions in urban or suburban districts. In order to be productive with limited time, money, and talent, rural schools do best to recruit at colleges that traditionally serve rural markets or have rural training projects. A growing number of higher education institutions have such projects, centers, and programs.

Some programs specialize in employment problems and special needs of children and youth in rural schools. Western Washington University operates a special education teacher training program, the National Rural Project and ACRES Rural Job Services. New Mexico Highlands University trains individuals for rural multicultural, bilingual communities in the Rocky Mountain West.

Establishing formal relationships with specialized institutions can be beneficial. Practicing rural educators who lecture before teachers-in-training can make important additions to college course work. Financial compensation seldom is offered, but the experience of working with future teachers can be stimulating and enhance one professionally.

Included among the university-based small and rural school programs are:

- Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah
- Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.
- Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo.
- East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.
- Eastern Oregon State College, La Grande, Ore.
- Gonzaga University, Spokane, Wash.
- Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kan.
- New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, N.M.
- New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, N.M.
- Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas
- Southwest State University, Marshall, Minn.
- Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas
- University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, N.D.
- University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa
- University of South Dakota, Vermillion, S.D.
- Washington State University, Pullman, Wash.
- University of Vermont, Burlington, V.T.
- Western Washington University, Bellingham Wash.

This is also a time for district teachers to make personal contact with students and collect mailing addresses for later recruitment. Officials at Carrizozo Municipal Schools in New Mexico have encouraged teachers to take professional leave for one session to teach in colleges of education. These practitioners are able to convey the realities of rural life and education and encourage prospective graduates to consider starting their careers in Carrizozo.

Van Sweet, superintendent of the Dos Palos (California) Joint Elementary School District makes personal contact with universities by letter, phone calls and occasional visits. Universities then send him computer printouts with background data on applicants, occasionally identifying the best candidates for particular positions. Placement offices also inform local schools in his district about the number of graduates in each discipline.

Other groups to target for recruitment include:

- College and universities that wish to improve student admissions from rural areas.
- Land-grant colleges already familiar with services to rural areas.

- State departments of education staff.
- Placement and career centers.
- Subject area professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the Council for Exceptional Children.
- Administrator or board member organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Asssociation or their state affiliates.
- Education office personnel organizations within the state.
- Regional and statewide informal networks.
- Personnel departments of urban and suburban school districts.

Vacancy announcements must extoll the virtues of the school district, the community, and the students. The network of recruiters can extend to colleagues and associates in other school districts, regional and state education agencies, and the education business field. School products salespeople, for example, can spread the news of openings and application information if they are informed about a district's recruiting needs. The broader based a recruiting network is, the greater the likelihood of a large and qualified selection of candidates. The best recruiters advise following these guidelines:

- Develop clear and concise job announcements, vacancy descriptions, and eligibility qualifications distinguishable from those of other districts.
- List vacancies as widely as possible in placement centers, urban newspapers, and organization newsletters.
- Develop attractive promotional brochures and defray costs with funds from the state extension service, local economic development district, or chamber of commerce.

Some districts find that publicizing incentives helps attract qualified teachers. Some promotion ideas that have been used successfully include:

- Arranging interest-free loans to help with moving expenses.
- Picking up travel and other costs for employment interviews.
- Staring any attractive benefits such as high salaries, increments for extracurricular duty assignments, broad-based insurance and health benefits, and leave allowances.

One incentive that has special appeal to local residents is a practice whereby a local community member is sent to college on a district-paid scholarship in return for several years service to the school district.

Recruiting efforts often require special contacts for the hard-to-

fill jobs, including coaches and special educators. Some districts establish a day when college admissions and placement directors can visit and acquaint themselves with the district. Others have held a regional recruiting event or "job fair" in a central location convenient to several small and rural school districts.

Chapter V

Retaining Quality Staff: Helping Teachers Acclimate and Grow

Individuals most likely to stay in rural school districts are those with lifestyles, expectations, goals, and mores compatible with a community's majority. Helping new teachers acclimate, therefore, is an important part of a recruitment and retention program. Experts suggest that employment interviews should include information about the measures a school district takes to retain good teachers and help them adjust to rural life.

Surveys conducted by the National Rural Project show that adjustment can be eased when new staff learn about the local power structure and the community's communication systems. Researchers have concluded also that officials need long term strategies in place to tackle a district's problems. A district's interest in solving problems regarding scarce resources and services, for example, makes it easier for a new staff member to envision staying in the community and becoming part of it.

Many rural and small schools have developed ideas to help teachers find their place within the school and community. Van Sweet of the Dos Palos Joint Union Elementary School District in California suggests a one-day orientation program of preservice education for new faculty prior to the arrival of returning staff for the start of school. The information activities help to establish an early sense of employment security, he says. The day-long session should be followed by a social gathering for faculty, spouses, members of

the board of education and administrators. During the next 30 days, the building principal and superintendent should have a short follow-up session to answer and resolve problems that have arisen.

Here are other suggestions that rural and small schools have used to help their staff acclimate and grow professionally:

- Establish a colleague support program by pairing established staff members with new staff during the initial adjustment period.
- Promote employee assistance through district services or by referral for staff members with personal problems that affect their ability to teach.
- Bring recognition to new staff members and the accomplishments of returning staff through broadcast and print media and presentations at board of education and civic organization meetings.
- Assist in the acquisition of awards, grants, and other honors for staff and students. Seek opportunities to win staff awards on the local, regional, state, and national levels.
- Seek grants, scholarships, and travel stipends for teachers from agencies outside the district.
- Assign faculty in their area of certification, supporting their efforts to be competent and creative.

Suggestions from the National Rural Project include:

- Placing new teachers in leadership positions in activities that will enhance external cultural perspectives of the staff.
- Initiating intra- or interdistrict short term exchange programs, sometimes relying on the bartering system to exchange talented personnel.
- Creating inservice incentives such as release time, college credit, and certification renewal.
- Providing challenging assignments as part of preservice or inservice programs.
- Establishing merit increases and other bonuses for extraordinary performance.
- Developing activities that will reduce stress, including social functions, physiological stress reduction exercises, and opportunities for "venting."
- Creating higher-than-usual salary supplements.
- Giving itinerant staff members who have no permanent office and others who must undergo trying circumstances opportunities for peer recognition. One effective technique is to hold social events in order to publicize staff achievements.
- Using a management information system (manual card sorting

or computerized retrieval system) to link teachers who need to see certain theories work in practice with effective teachers who use them regularly with success.

Retention activities are interactive and work with an advantage in small and rural schools, which often have a closeness and warmth said to be lacking in many large schools.

Finding qualified teachers and holding onto them results from the creative use of these advantages.

Making Up for Preservice Training Deficiencies

Helping new staff members adjust to rural or small communities is a bigger problem when the educators feel they are not prepared adequately by college or university training programs for the realities of rural school life.

A 1980 federal briefing paper from the Office of Special Education Programs stated that acute shortages of rural special educators results because preservice programs have not prepared personnel who can adjust to the demands of remote, isolated, or culturally different rural areas. A 1983 poll of state directors of special education personnel, conducted by Smith and Burke, concurred that teachers are not prepared for the socialization of work in rural communities. These findings imply that inservice training for new teachers—special educators as well as regular educators—will have to fill the unmet needs of educators who come to work in rural or small schools.

Based upon these special education studies, there are certain understandings that new teachers should have in order to cope effectively with life in rural areas. These include:

- A district's plans to overcome problems in delivering services and resources.
- Information about rural geographic and socioeconomic subcultures, mores, and values.
- Techniques of working with rural peers, families, and communities, including transient populations.
- Methods of coping with remoteness to personal enrichment opportunities.
- Methods of reducing stress.

Special Resources
The Rural Job Referral Service

Thousands of jobs in rural America offer unique challenges and rewards for educators and other school personnel. The American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) is a rural job referral service designed to link qualified individuals needing jobs with agencies across the country that have vacancies.

Sponsored by ACRES agencies those who subscribe to the service receive a computerized list of qualified applicants interested in working in the general geographical location where the agency is located. Bimonthly updates are filled with new job bank applicants. In addition, short term personnel exchanges are advertised.

Other advertisements are placed in an electronic telecommunications system and in national journals. Prospective personnel who request information receive computerized lists, by geographic locations, that include job listings and qualifications.

Fees for listing vacancies and providing potential applicants with information about positions are minimal. For more information, contact: American Council on Rural Special Education, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Wash. 98225; (206) 676-3000. Those subscribing to the specialnet electronic information system can contact the service by the user name "ACRES".

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